

TRAVELERS IN MEXICO

The picture taken in good humor on a dry stretch of road, was on a road that gave us most trouble. Twenty seven kilometers of grief between Chapala and Jocotepec. Below is a ferry which takes the cars across the river. (Pictures by Francis Hanson.)

which has seen American tourists for many, many years and it is flanked with motels, autels and all types of hotels. It is a tourist route and every town has hawkers of all ages, all English speaking, ready to sell something. The food will be pretty much to the American taste and water safe to drink is obtainable. The first half of the coastal state of Tamualipas differs hardly from coastal Texas, except that it is less populated and more forsaken. Passing the Tropic of Cancer dense palm forests occupy much of the territory. Cutting through the corner of the state of San Luis Potosi, and as one ascends the mountain range in the states of Hidalgo and Mexico, the roads then are truly something to talk about. It is mountain road the likes of which one has never seen in his life anywhere in the U. S. or in his nightmares. It is one continual "curva" after "curva". One "Camino Sinuoso" followed up by "Curva Peligrosa" (Winding roads and dangerous curves) mile after mile after mile and after mile until one practically gets into the valley of Mexico. Yet, to the credit of Mexico, the roads are wonderfully engineered, well banked and safely paved. In the mountains of Hidalgo and Mexico, the growth is lush and semi-tropic. Towns are far between. Some of the towns (Poblados) in this area are rather Asiatic in appearance. One would barely know whether he is in Okinawa, Korea, some Polynesian island or Mexico—the same style of hut and the same type of Flora. The huts are tiny, the walls are either of sticks or boards which do not serve to keep away any wind but only to support a roof thatched either with straw or leaves.

Those coming via El Paso-Chihuahua will find traveling much easier. The state of Chihuahua does not differ from Arizona and New Mexico. Same ocotillo, cholla, yuca, sotol and nopal cacti, including desert willow. The topography differs hardly. The distance of communities and gasoline stations are further, but the road is a honey — to a point of monotony—straight as a pin and with seldom curves, even slight ones. This all ends (straight roads) with the states of Durango and

Zacatecas and from then on, but the excellence of the engineered roads continues. The towns and populated areas become denser and the trip by far of greater interest than along the Pan American highway. One sees picturesque Poblados with their ever present double steepled churches of Churigueresque or Baroque styles. The huts are of adobe—sun-baked clay bricks, roofless, often windowless and colorless. If not for the church one would not know a Poblado is being approached as the homes of adobe blend themselves with the surrounding grounds.

The streets during towns are, as a rule, never paved. If the highway passes through it then the street will be decently cobbled, otherwise the streets are either torn up and impassable or muddy and impassable; the streets of poblados and even larger cities, are narrow.

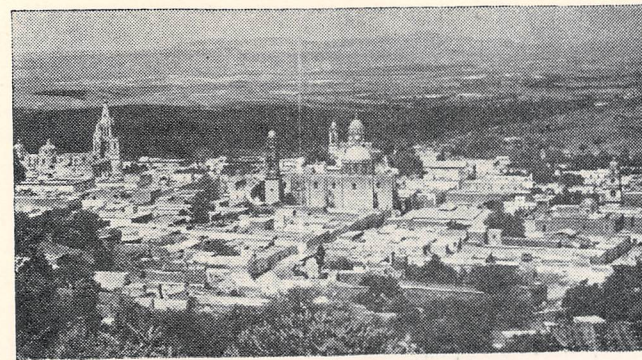
If you are a tourist, you do not speak Spanish and your tires are only normal, follow only the tried and beaten road laid out for tourists. Do not get off the road and do not venture to side streets in your car unless you have plenty brand new tires in the back of the car, are adventurous, are not of a faint heart, and not given to lose temper and are able to cope with situations. Also, if a Mexican tells you that a road is bad, be sure to believe him. The above warning goes doubly during the rainy season. Stick to the road. There is still more than what one could grasp to see even along the beaten path. Don't look for heartaches.

Streets serve often as river beds during the rainy season. Such river beds are called "Vado" in Spanish (probably from the Arabic "Whadi"). They are deep dips and you are well warned ahead of time and heed the warning. Often all crossing streets are Vados. In the smaller villages streets seldom have sidewalks.

The homes in most poblados and outskirts of towns appear miserable and would seem that they could hardly withold a good rain. Because of lack of chimneys the door is the outlet for smoke. The houses themselves seem dark, forbidding and very small. At the same time, they do not seem to be used for much except perhaps to sleep under a roof. For, through the open doors one catches glimpses of neat and lovely patios with flowers, plants and life of sunshine and the adobes only serve as a wall between the street of strangers and their own selves.

Language Knowledge

You'll be told by tourists and agencies and publicity leaflets that one need not know Spanish in order to get along in Mexico. This statement can't be made without reservations. One can get along mighty well without knowing a word of Spanish if he visits the border towns (where most people usually go), follows the laid out route for tourists or visits the swanky hotels and sight-seeing places frequented by the Acapulco set of tourists. Your Mexican vocabulary might even be enriched and consist of "how mucho, too mucho, mucho good, no mucho good". In Mexico City, the stores on the Avenidas have English speaking help. Americans, all stratas of tourists, usually go to Sanborn's to eat and shop and change their traveler's checks. There one can get sodas and malts. In their dining room, which is always packed, to be admitted you must be properly dressed and men must wear coats. It supposed to be "your home when away from home" (providing you live high at home). If you anticipate (bravely) to be off the beaten path, then the knowledge of the Spanish language is not only helpful but is an absolute necessity and do not let tourist brochures kid you otherwise.



A MEXICAN PANORAMA

Rolling country, mountains and church steeples are the far-off first views of Mexican landscapes. This is a birds eye view looking down upon San Miguel Allende in the state of Guanajuato.

Climate: Everlasting Spring

Mexico has all types of climate. Tamualipas, Vera Cruz, Tabasco and the states in the Yucateen peninsula are humid, hot and can be unbearable. However, most of Mexico, particularly the densely populated part, has a climate with which very few countries are blessed. It is truly an eternal spring in most of Mexico. The days are warm and the evenings are cool. One can be always well dressed, wear a full suit and feel comfortable. As far as climate is concerned, that's the Land! Never winter but ever spring.

Food And Disentery

Of the American tourists, those who go beyond the border towns, 99% fall prey to a dissentery which lays them low and ruins their entire vacation. The duration might be anywhere from two days to throughout the entire stay in Mexico. The high altitude of Mexico might be one factor. Their water, which is not purified, is the main offender, but even people who do not drink their water, suffer nevertheless. American tourists are prewarned to avoid water, raw-vegetables and are not to eat Mexican food unless it be in recommended bona fide hotels and restaurants. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, if you are an American who always avoided foreign and different foods and are accustomed to one type of cooking, you may rest assured that you'll be sick like a "po' dawg" and miserable, too. Be prepared with all kinds of pills to combat the "Gringo plague". At the same time do not be too finnick and don't let your imagination take advantage of you. Allow a day or two to overcome the crises and start building up a resistance to their foods. A few days of dissentery killed no one — to my knowledge. Carelessness and overly great care are two extremes to shun. If you are one whose stomach is overly delicate then do your foreign traveling in Canada.

There are many wonderful varieties of strange fruits in Mexico. It would be a pity to by pass them. Five types of bananas, papayas, and their oranges are out of this world. Florida and California would turn green with envy at the sweetness of their aranges. Limes are plentiful and are used in the same capacity as is salt and pepper among Americans. It is served with your soup and with soft boiled eggs or with whatever one orders to eat, and the lime does add a delicate, tangy taste.

Costumes Versus Overalls.

No one expects to see the festive regional costumes of the Mexicans to be worn daily. Such costumes are set aside for festive occasions. But there was a time, and

not too long ago, when an every-day type of regional costume was fairly common. Along the Pan-American highway the regional costume is not at all evident. They wear what any American laborer would wear, or whatever any American of the "lower-lower" category would wear. Along the Chihuahua-Durango-Zacatecas-Guadalupe-Mexico highway, regionalism in costume is still fairly evident. The "serape" for men is worn through upper Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas and parts of Jalisco. Much of Jalisco, parts of Mexico and the entire state of Michoacan, the "Tipona", a type of a poncho, is universal and worn by all men and children. For the most part they are dull colored and simple in design; few are of bright colors. The Sombrero such as we consider Mexican, is seen everywhere in the western states. In the States of Mexico, Puebla, Tlaxcala, an entire different type of a straw hat, round, flat domed, wide brimmed and very unlike the other sombrero, is worn by the men and the women. Along the Pan-American highway the soft straw hat as seen in the States, is worn.

Among women the Reboza (a type of a shawl) is very universal. No woman (excluding the border cities) is seen without one. For the most part they are black. In Michoacan a blue reboza with a thin white pencil stripe is seen and very rarely anything of brighter shades. With the reboza the women also wrap their infants and tie them on to their backs and walk around as American Indian women would do to their pappoose. They are quite a sight when congregated either in the church, where women sit on one side only and forming a solid mass of black, or in the cemeteries, where they seem to congregate toward the evening in large numbers standing erect around graves as if they were black markers.

The Indian women walk barefooted, the men wear various types of guaraches. Overalls seem to replace more and more the white trouser and shirt of the men. Women still wear, in many localities, the full white skirt of many folds with a cerise type of red edging at the very bottom, wide solid colored aprons, a jacket-like blouse and the ever present reboza.

A thing that will throw itself to the tourists eye will be the sight of women ever busy, ever walking, or river shores with women ever washing clothes. Men? Ever sitting in the door ways or street corners and diddling away their time in plain sheer gossip and looking picturesque and lazy in his sombrero and poncho.

In the cities the "ciudadanos" city folk, wear the same type of clothes which any upper-lower, lower-upper and upper-upper classes of people would wear according to their financial status. However, they wear it (as yet) with better taste. One can spot an American a mile away, particularly a present day American Male.

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